Mr A.A. Allen (*in litt.* 1 June 1998) referred to the very local nature of the fly in the Blackheath area of south-east London. He said that it was constantly met with on the flowers of *Solidago canadensis* L. in his former garden at Blackheath, a few occurred in his present address at Charlton but soon disappeared with the reduction of the plant and had seen only one other, at Blackheath some ten years later.

Collin's records dated from 26 July to 1 October and the above data confirm that *R. variabilis* is a late summer – early autumn species. This fact alone cannot for its apparent rarity as much collecting has been done within the similar Blean Woods complex north and east of Canterbury during the same period. Furthermore it is quite a conspicuous medium-sized empidid having a brownish body and yellowish legs. It may be yet another case of an insect being regarded as common on the basis of a restricted sample of sites.– LAURENCE CLEMONS, 14 St. John's Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4NE.

The Shetland Biological Records Centre

Shetland Biological Records Centre was established in 1998 to collate biological records in one of the most important wildlife areas in the British Isles. With the help of Shetland Entomological Group, we aim to create a comprehensive database of entomological records for Shetland. We are very keen to hear from anyone who may have made a trip to Shetland in the past, and who may have potentially interesting and valuable records which we are unaware of. We would also like to encourage anyone planning a visit to Shetland to lodge a copy of any wildlife records with us. Issues such as data ownership, confidentiality etc. will be respected as a priority, where appropriate, and all records will be acknowledged.

Finally we wish to contact two people who are believed to have collected information about Shetland's invertebrate populations: Jon Daws from Leicestershire and Neil Marks from Norfolk. If anyone can put us in touch with these two, or if they are readers, we would be delighted to hear from them.

If you can help, or if you would simply like more information about the project, please contact me.– ROGER RIDDINGTON, Shetland Biological Records Centre, 22-24 North Road, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0NQ.
(01595 694688; email: shetamenity.trust@zetnet.co.uk).

New aberration of Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* (L.) (Lep.: Hesperiidae)

The Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* is represented over most of its British and Irish range by subspecies *E. t. tages* (L.) which is predominantly single-brooded and characterised by a dark grey-brown ground colour with paler transverse forewing bands. Though minor variation in ground colour and markings is common, and Irish subspecies *baynesi* Huggins and second brood specimens show regional and seasonal differences, major aberrations are rare and involve diminution or expansion of the pale transverse bands (Russwurm, 1978. *Aberrations of British Butterflies*, E.W. Classey; Emmet & Heath, 1990. *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. **7** (1), Harley Books).

On 1.vi.1996 an exceptionally pale-looking *E. tages* was noticed flying on a cleared slope within Combe Wood, Berkshire (51° 20′ N, 1° 29′ W) and netted for closer examination. Though the entire underside and hindwing uppersides were typical in colour, the forewing uppersides were predominantly pale ochreous cream, with the areas corresponding to the usual ground colour being very pale brown and obscure on the left side and virtually indiscernible on the right. The individual showed no visible wear and tear and the presence of forewing costal folds established it to be male.

The aberration does not correspond to any named form (Russwurm, 1978; Emmet & Heath, 1990) and was retained as a voucher. However a specimen listed by Worldwide Butterflies (1995. *British Butterfly Aberrations*) and described as "basically off white with some darker markings", though not figured and now in private possession (Robert C. Goodden, *pers. comm.*), may represent a related phenomenon affecting the entire upperside and possibly the underside. Since even aberrations of limited visual appeal can provide insights into pattern development and evolution (Nijhout, 1991. *The Development and Evolution of Butterfly Wing Patterns*. Smithsonian Institution Press; Winokur, 1996. *Br. J. Ent. Nat. Hist.* **9**: 193-195), the documentation of full descriptions is encouraged in order that comparative information should not be lost.– L. WINOKUR, 8 Parklands Close, Chandlers Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire SO53 2EQ.

Some interesting records of moths in the Isle of Wight in the winter of 1998-99

December was a very mild and wet month with a couple of dry and cold spells. On 13 December Brian Warne took *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) at light at Binstead and on 30 December he recorded *Apocheima pilosaria* (D.&S.) at the same locality. Both these species normally emerge in the spring and so are exceptionally early by about three months.

On 20 December a beautiful dark example of *Chrysodeixis chalcites* (Esp.) emerged from its pupa spun up in nettle *Urtica dioica*. I found the half grown larva on Spanish celery which I bought at the local Somerfields supermarket at Freshwater on 19 November. It fed up quickly, first on celery then on nettle and pupated on 7 December, in which stage it remained for only 13 days. On 22 November I found a fully grown larva of *Heliothis armigera* (Hb.) in a Spanish pepper also at the same supermarket. This soon pupated and emerged on New Year's Day.

I should also mention some late migrants. On 9 December I recorded *Peridroma saucia* (Hb.) and the pyralid *Udea ferrugalis* (Hb.). On 14 December I recorded a perfect specimen of *Mythimna unipuncta* (Haw.) which could have been a locally bred example and on 21 December I found a well-marked *Peridroma saucia* which had been attracted to an outside electric light at the Freshwater Conservative Club.– S.A. KNILL-JONES, Roundstone, 2 School Green Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight.